

S. Emmanuël

NEW HORIZONS FOR THE WOMEN RELIGIOUS

ADDRESS BY HIS HOLINESS,
POPE PAUL VI
SEPTEMBER 8, 1964



ST. PAUL EDITIONS

THE NEW HORIZONS

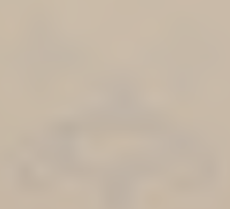
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Translation prepared for
The Pope Speaks
by Rev. Austin Vaughn

Printed by the Daughters of St. Paul
Boston, Mass. 02130

SERMON OF POPE PAUL VI TO
WOMEN RELIGIOUS AT MASS AT CASTEL
GANDOLFO ON THE FEAST OF THE
NATIVITY OF OUR LADY

E motivo

September 8, 1964

Beloved Daughters in Christ! It brings Us great spiritual consolation to be able to celebrate the feast of the Nativity of Mary Most Holy with all you good and dear Sisters!

Very often as We celebrate sacred feasts We are anxious about the understanding and the participation of the faithful present for the ceremony. We have reason to doubt whether they understand, whether they are really joining in the prayer of the Church, whether they enjoy a full grasp of the mysteries being recalled, of the prayers being offered up, of the spiritual and moral value of all things that worship ought to present to our souls. No such thought, no such doubt, exists now! We are sure that you are all here with Us to give full meaning to this holy Mass in honor of Mary's birth, and to devote all your fervor to it. There are three obvious reasons for this that combine to make the present ceremony a solemn and memorable one.

Mary the dawn of our salvation

The first reason is that it obliges us to recall the appearance of Our Lady in the world as the arrival of the dawn that comes before the light of salvation, Christ Jesus; as the opening out, on an earth covered over with the dirt of sin, of the most beautiful flower that has ever blossomed in the garden of mankind. We refer to the birth of the purest, the most innocent, the most perfect of creatures, the one most worthy of the definition that God Himself gave when creating man: image of God, likeness of God—which is to say, a beauty that is supreme, profound, so ideal in its being and form and so real in its living expression as to give us an idea of how this original creature was destined, on the one hand, to an exchange with his Creator, to the love of his Creator, in an indescribable outpouring of the most blessed and beautifying Divinity and in an unconditional reply filled with poetry and joy (as the “Magnificat” of Our Lady really is); and how he was destined, on the other hand, to royal dominion over the earth.

The image of mankind perfected

Through a design of infinite mercy (We could almost say through a resolution for reconquest like that of the artist who, upon seeing his work shattered, decided to do it over and to make it even more beautiful and more in accordance with his creative idea), God took what was to appear and then disappear in miserable fashion in Eve, and He made it live again in Mary—“*ut dignum Filii tui habitaculum effici mereretur, Spiritu Sancto cooperante, praeparasti,*”¹ as the prayer you all know so well puts it. Today, a day dedicated to the veneration of this gift, of this masterpiece of God, we recall, we admire, we exult: Mary is born, Mary is ours, Mary restores to us the image of mankind perfected in her immaculate human conception, which corre-

sponds in a stupendous fashion to the divine mind's mysterious conception of a creature as queen of the world.

Mary, to the fresh and supreme joy, the enchanting joy of our souls, does not hold our gaze fixed upon herself but rather urges it to look ahead, to the miracle of light and of holiness and of life that she proclaims with her birth and that she will bring with her—Christ the Lord, her Son, the Son of God, from whom she herself receives everything. This is the celebrated interplay of grace that is called Incarnation and that today makes us see a presage of the coming of our salvation in Mary, the lamp that bears the divine light, the gate through which Heaven will direct its steps toward earth, the mother who will offer human life to the Word of God.

You know all these things, most beloved daughters. You meditate on them, you honor them, you imitate them. Mary gives you the sublime picture of them, in which she triumphs in humility and in glory without equal. Is not this a reason to make Us glad to know that all of you are intimately bound up with this joy of the Church, with this glorification of Our Lady?

Mary's birthday a family event

Secondly, you are celebrating this sweet and intimate feast with Us like a day in your own home, like a family event that draws hearts together to share in lovely sentiments. It is the feast of everyone's heavenly Mother; and We realize that your devotion increases by reason of the fact that today you are celebrating it together with this humble father of everyone on earth, with the Pope. And the pious satisfaction that goes with this makes Us happy too, as We feel your devotion united to Our own, your prayer to Ours, your trust to Ours.

We feel, dear and good Sisters, that this morning you are the bouquet of flowers with which We appear before

Mary to express Our best wishes—or better, Our devotion—on her birthday! A kind of childlike speech rises to Our lips: See, Mary, what We are offering you—these flowers. They are the most beautiful flowers of the Holy Church. They are souls with a single love, a love for your divine Son Jesus. They are souls who have really believed His words and have left everything to follow Him alone. They listen to Him, they imitate Him, they serve Him, they follow Him, along with you, yes, even to the Cross. They do not complain, they are not afraid, they do not weep; instead they are always joyful, they are always good, they are holy—these daughters of the Church of Christ!

For Religious, a special place in the Church community

We hope that Our Most Blessed Lady will listen to these simple words and that she will feel honored by the offering that We today make to her of you, Sisters—indeed, of all the Sisters in the Holy Church. We hope that she who is blessed among all will choose to look upon all of them with those merciful eyes of hers (*“illos tuos misericordes oculos . . .”*), that she will choose to gladden them, that she will choose to protect and bless them; because they are hers, and they are hers because they are the Church’s!

It seems to Us that this meeting brings out this aspect of your religious life in a very special way. Why are you so happy to assist at the Pope’s holy Mass today and to venerate Our Most Blessed Lady along with him? And why is the Pope so happy to have you with him? Because you are, as We said, the Church’s. You belong to the Mystical Body of Christ through bonds of very special adherence, and you have a special place in the Church community. You are the Church’s joy, you are her honor, you are her beauty, you are her consolation, you are her

example. You, We could add, are her strength! Your piety, your humility, your docility, your spirit of sacrifice make you the specially loved daughters of the holy Church.

Renewing a "feeling for the Church"

This meeting ought to bring back to life in you a "feeling for the Church." Sometimes it happens that this "feeling for the Church" is given less attention or is less cultivated in certain religious families, by reason of the fact that they live apart and find all the objects of their immediate interest within the confines of their own communities and know little of what is going on beyond the limits of their own activities, to which they are completely dedicated. Sometimes it happens that their religious life has limited horizons, not only with regard to the course of events in this world, but even with regard to the life of the Church, her major occurrences, her thoughts and her teachings, her spiritual ardor, her sufferings and her good fortune.

This is not an ideal situation for a Sister; she loses sight of the great overall vision of the divine plan for our salvation and for our sanctification. It is not a privilege to remain on the fringes of the life of the Church and to build a spirituality of your own that has nothing to do with the sharing of words, of grace and of charity that is proper to the catholic community of the brethren in Christ.

Fuller participation in the life of the Church

Without depriving Sisters of the silence, the recollection, the relative autonomy, and the special manner that the type of life they are leading requires, We hope that they may get back a more direct and full participation in the life of the Church, in the liturgy in particular, in

social welfare, in the modern apostolate, in the service of the brethren. A great deal is being done in this direction; and We feel that it is to the benefit of the Sister's sanctification and to the benefit of the faithful who are edified.

We recall that when We were at Milan, on the occasion of this very feast, We invited the dear Sisters of the Child Mary to assist at Our pontifical Mass in that Duomo which is certainly one of the greatest and most beautiful cathedrals in the world, and which is dedicated to the Nativity of Mary. None of those Sisters had felt called through her own devotion to take part in the solemn and splendid ceremony honoring Mary's birth, a ceremony in the Cathedral of the city where they have their mother-house as well as a magnificent network of charitable activities; the Archbishop invited them. Afterward they came to the Duomo every year in large numbers. They were happy to feel that they were specially loved daughters of the Church on that day, just as We were happy to greet them during Our homily and to bless them as models worthy of Our approval and good will. We recall too how edifying it seemed to see, in specially reserved places in the churches of the flourishing missionary communities of Southern Rhodesia and Nigeria, Sisters of various religious families assisting at the Sunday services, to their great honor and to the great consolation and admiration of all the faithful.

Now then, this meeting will, We repeat, serve to re-ignite love for the Church in you and, We hope, throughout the vast ranks of women Religious. It will serve to put you in ever closer communion with her. This is a great thought—remember it—and one that can open a window onto the spiritual reality to which you have dedicated your life; the Church is the work of salvation established by Christ. It is a great thought that can comfort and sustain the modest and the hidden nature of your works; the Church is the kingdom of the Lord, and whoever belongs to it and whoever serves it shares in the dignity and fate

of this kingdom. Yes, the Church is something great to think about, and the thought opens up to your generosity pathways that enable it to be ever more productive of apostolic results, wise charity, immense merits.

Women auditors to attend Council

We believe that the day has come when the life of women Religious has to be given greater honor and be made more effective, and that this can be done by perfecting the bonds that unite it to the life of the whole Church. We will let you in on a little secret in this regard: We have given orders that some devout qualified ladies are to attend as auditors several of the solemn ceremonies and several of the General Congregations of the coming third session of the Second Vatican Council; what We have in mind are those Congregations that will discuss matters of particular concern to the lives of women. Hence we will have present at an ecumenical council, perhaps for the first time, a representation of women—only a small one, obviously, but still significant and you might say symbolic—from you Sisters, first of all, and then from the great Catholic women's organizations. Women thus will know just how much honor the Church pays to them in the dignity of their being and of their mission on the human and Christian levels.

Concern for woman's plight

While it gives Us joy to let you in on this news, We are saddened by the thought of all the many aspects of modern life that portray woman as fallen from the spiritual and ethical heights attributed to her by the best civic standards and the loftiness of her Christian vocation, to the level of moral insensitivity and often of pagan license. They also show woman, in the course of having pathways of the

most dangerous and harmful experiences opened to her, being deprived of the true happiness and true love that can never be separated from the sacred meaning of life.

And it pains Us too to see that many feminine souls, made for lofty and generous things, today no longer know how to give their lives a full and higher meaning, because they lack two elements of interior fullness: prayer, in its complete, personal and sacramental expression; and the spirit of dedication, of a love that gives and vivifies. They remain poor and tormented souls, getting a deceptive remedy from external distractions.

The state of religious vocations

And here you have the third reason for the spiritual joy that comes to Us from this meeting and brings Us consolation. It is that your numbers and your fervor show that there are still strong and pure souls who have a thirst for perfection and are neither afraid nor ashamed to put on the religious habit, the habit of total consecration of one's own life to the Lord.

In truth, here again We have to make a double observation that is not a happy one. Religious vocations, for women too, are falling off; yet both the Church and secular society have a growing need for these vocations. This is one of the problems of our time for whose solution we must work and pray.

But let Us linger for a moment now over the proof of religious vitality supplied by your presence here. We want to thank Our Lady for this consolation, which permits Us to glimpse her providential and maternal help to the Church. It offers Us the example of a rebirth of Christian generosity, which makes us think of the whole treasury of good works to which your life is consecrated.

A threefold wish

We are praying to Our Lady for you, that she may give you an assurance that the choice you have made is a good one. It is the best, the most difficult and at the same time the easiest. It is the closest to that of Mary Most Holy because, like hers, it is completely governed by a simple and total abandonment to the divine will: **Fiat mihi secundum Verbum tuum!**² We will pray that she may make you strong; nowadays the religious life calls for strength. In times past it may have been a refuge for many weak and timid souls; today it is the workshop of souls that are strong, dependable, and heroic. Last of all We will pray that Our Lady may make you happy and joyful. Religious life, no matter how poor and austere it may be, cannot be genuine except with interior joy! This is what We wish you as a lasting reminder of this meeting, as We ask all of you for prayers for the Council and for the whole Church, and as We give you Our Blessing.

FOOTNOTES

1. "With the help of the Holy Spirit, you have prepared her to deserve to be made a worthy dwelling place for thy Son."
2. Be it done unto me according to thy word!

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Boston, Mass. 02111
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So. Boston, Mass. 02127
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Homebush N.S.W., Australia
226 Victoria Square
Adelaide, South-Australia
6 Muir Street
Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia

Papal Documents

Condition of the Working Classes, Leo XIII \$.25 – Unity of the Church, Leo XIII \$.25 – Atheistic Communism, Pius XI \$.25 – Christian Education of Youth, Pius XI \$.25 – Christian Marriage, Pius XI \$.25 – Motion Pictures, Pius XI \$.15 – Social Reconstruction, Pius XI \$.25 – “Sponsa Christi”, Pius XII \$1.00 – Addresses of Pius XII to Cloistered Religious \$1.25 – Function of the State in the Modern World, Pius XII \$.25 – The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pius XII \$.15 – Holy Virginity, Pius XII \$.25 – The Mystical Body of Christ, Pius XII \$.25 – The Sacred Liturgy, Pius XII \$.25 – Near the Chair of Peter, John XXIII \$.25 – From the Beginning of Our Priesthood, John XXIII \$.25 – Mater et Magistra, John XXIII \$.25 – Pacem in Terris, John XXIII \$.25 – Grateful Memory, John XXIII \$.15 – Veterum Sapientia, John XXIII \$.15 – Ordinationes ad Constitutionem Apostolicam “Veterum Sapientia” Rite Exsequendam, John XXIII \$.15 – To Women Religious, John XXIII \$.15 – Paenitentiam Agere, John XXIII \$.15 – Peace Message, John XXIII \$.05 – De Latinitas Studio Provehendo, John XXIII \$.15 – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Paul VI \$.25 – Ecclesiam Suam, Paul VI \$.25 – Summi Dei Verbum and Address on Seminaries and Vocations, Paul VI, \$.20 – Decree on the Media of Social Communication \$.15 – Heights of Heroism in Life of Pius XII, Paul VI \$.05 – To All Religious, Paul VI \$.15 – Instruction on the Liturgy \$.25 – Decree on Ecumenism \$.25 – Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite \$.15 – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church \$.50 – The Month of May, Paul VI \$.15 – Mystery of Faith, Paul VI \$.25 – Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church \$.30 – Decree on Priestly Training \$.15 – Decree on Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life \$.15 – Declaration on Christian Education \$.15 – Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions \$.10 – Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity \$.30 – Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation \$.25 – Declaration on Religious Freedom \$.20 – Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity \$.30 – Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests \$.30 – Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World \$.65

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Oct 30, 2013

